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Defense Challenges the Home Economist

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Defense Challenges the Home Economist

Dr. P. Mabel Nelson, foods and nutrition head, explains the role of the home economist in the present emergency

THE real responsibility for the success or failure of the national plan for improving the nutrition of the masses rests on the home economics group and depends upon their acceptance of it.

The job of the nutritionists during the next 30 years will be to improve individual and national health through the use of the knowledge they have accumulated. No nation is stronger than its people. To have the strongest nation we must have the strongest people. The work of the majority of women will be to care for the civilian population, rather than men in the army camps.

Does nutrition work? This is the question the laymen want answered. The most dramatic answer comes from the story of Admiral Byrd's trips to the Anarctic. For both expeditions he and his men were provided with scientifically planned rations. Every man returned in good health from the first expedition. We anticipate the same results when the recent expedition reaches the United States in April.

Are you willing to eat your way to health? If the man of the family refuses to eat green beans, a source of Vitamin C, what will be the effect on the children? It may change the eating habits of the entire family. It is apparent that individual responsibility cannot be counted upon for providing optimal nutrition.

The greatest contributions to national health have not been those that demanded individual concern. The water supply is kept clean by the efforts of sanitary engineers. Milk is inspected according to governmental regulations. We know that infectious diseases can be taken care of by little effort of our own. Now the nutritional status of our people has become a national problem.

A part of the new program will be changing production habits on the land. A Brookings Institute study shows that to reach minimal nutritional standards, an increase in production of 70 to 80 percent will be required over that of 1929. This would mean that in addition to the land now cultivated, an area the size of Iowa would have to be cultivated. Part of Secretary of Agriculture Wichard's plan is the extensive use of the land to improve the nutrition of the nation.

There will be more gardens and more perishable foods, high in food value, grown. The problem of storage of these perishable foods must be met by freezing and by adequate methods of canning.

Apples were studied to find if those produced contained the maximum amount of Vitamin C. Rather it was found that the chief aim of the apple producer was to develop hardy varieties. The optimal condition would be the production of apples which are both hardy and rich in vitamins.

Education is essential if an intelligent attitude toward nutrition is to be obtained. It will be necessary to reach those never reached by clubs and extension service. This will be the point of attack for the next weeks and months.

What care will be taken of the boys in the army? Colonel Howe, a trained biological chemist, knows what is necessary for adequate nourishment and energy. Soldiers are getting twice as much Vitamin B_1 as the rest of the population, and more than the standard of one gram of calcium per day now. Preparations of foods used for the German soldiers provide a better-fed army than heretofore.

Draft figures show that 32 to 35 percent of the applicants have been rejected because of poor health. Poor teeth was the cause of the greatest number of rejections, eyes, heart and ears causing the next greatest number. In 1919 it was said that if a man had two teeth above and two below he was all right. In 1940 he must have 12 above and 12 below.

The large number of rejections is alarming when one considers that but two percent were expected to be rejected. However, our standards are so high that only one man in 100 in Europe could pass the tests, according to statements made by our medical examiners of nutrition.

Two groups have been primarily concerned with improving national nutrition, the American Institute of Nutrition and the Council on Foods of the American Medical Association. The former in 1939 began its program for the retention, protection and restoration of vitamins to food. The Council on Foods of the American Medical Association adopted as their policy that general purpose foods, and only those, should be fortified. Flour, milk and salt, those foods everyone eats every day, have had valuable food constituents added.

Vitamin D has been added to milk and aids in the prevention of rickets in children. Butter substitutes have been fortified with Vitamin A. This is of special value to the lower income groups who do not regularly use butter. Iodine has long been added to salt. Approval has been obtained for the addition of calcium and iron salts to flour.

The latest fortification is the restoration of thiamin or Vitamin B to flour and bread. It is said to be the most important change in the milling industry in 75 years. This month it comes on the market under the name of "enriched flower."